

Message Text

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SUBJECT: SECRETARY OF STATE MASON MOVES TO WEAKEN SUPPORT FOR
PROTEST

REF: BELFAST 139

1. SUMMARY: NORTHERN IRELAND SECRETARY OF STATE AND NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE (NIO) MOVING ON TWO FRONTS TO WEAKEN SUPPORT FOR RUMORED GENERAL STRIKE IN PROTEST AGAINST SECURITY POLICY AND DIRECT RULE. SECSTATE IS ASSURING MINORITY PARTIES AND MORE MODERATE UNIONISTS OF FIRM DETERMINATION OF GOVERNMENT TO RESIST THAT KIND OF PRESSURE WHILE OTHER NIO SPOKESMEN POINT OUT ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL EFFECTS OF A GENERAL STOPPAGE. ISSUES ARE LESS CLEAR CUT AND LESS OBVIOUSLY VITAL THAN IN 1974 AND LEADERS OF LOYALIST PROTEST HAVE LESS SUPPORT. IT POSSIBLE PROTEST WILL TAKE FORM OTHER THAN GENERAL STRIKE.

END SUMMARY.

2. SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND ROY MASON RECEIVED THREE POLITICAL DELEGATIONS SEPARATELY APRIL 26 FOR UNCLASSIFIED

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DISCUSSIONS CONCENTRATED ON UNIONIST ACTION COUNCIL (UAC) THREAT OF PROTEST ACTION TO BEGIN NEXT TUESDAY MORNING MAY 3 (REFTEL). FOLLOWING MEETINGS: (A) HARRY WEST, LEADER OF OFFICIAL UNIONIST PARTY SAID THAT STRIKE COULD BE ILL-ADVISED BUT WAS CAREFUL TO SPECIFY HIS OPPOSITION BASED ON ECONOMIC CONDITION OF PROVINCE RATHER THAN ON SUPPORT FOR MR. MASON OR GOVERNMENT SECURITY POLICY. WEST SAID HIS PARTY WOULD BE PREPARED PUT

ANY PRESSURE SHORT OF STRIKE ON GOVERNMENT TO IMPRESS NEED FOR HARDER LINE ON SECURITY, (B) JOHN HUME, DEPUTY LEADER, SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOUR PARTY SDLP) DENIED THAT PROTEST COULD BE TERMED "STRIKE" AND THAT IT SHOULD BE CALLED "COUP D'ETAT." HE SAID HE VERY IMPRESSED BY MASON'S FIRM REASSURANCES. BOTH HUME AND MP GERRY FITT (AT WESTMINISTER) DESCRIBED LOYALIST PLANS AS "FASCIST", (C) ALLIANCE PARTY LEADER OLIVER NAPIER ALSO EXPRESSED SATISFACTION AT ASSURANCES BY MR. MASON TO ENFORCE RULE OF LAW. ALLIANCE PLACED QUARTER PAGE AD IN BELFAST NEWS LETTER APRIL 27 IN FORM OF OPEN LETTER TO (ERNEST) BAIRD (IAN) PAISLEY AND "THEIR U.U.A.C. COLLEAGUES" ASKING SEVEN CRITICAL QUESTIONS ABOUT MOTIVES FOR AND EFFECTS OF STRIKE. LAST QUESTION WAS: "WILL YOU ACCEPT THAT THE ONLY POLITICAL OBJECTIVE WHICH COULD POSSIBLY BE HELPED BY YOUR ACTION IS THE DECLARED AIM OF MR. BAIRD AND OTHERS WITHIN YOUR GROUP - INDEPENDENCE?"

3. OTHERS TO EXPRESS OPPOSITION TO STRIKE INCLUDE NORTHERN IRELAND LABOUR PARTY, SHADOW SPOKESMAN, AIREY NEAVE, A BELFAST REPUBLICAN CLUBS SPOKESMAN, EX-ULSTER WORKER'S COUNCIL LEADER HARRY MURRAY AND THE "P.R.O." FOR THE 1974 STOPPAGE, GLENN BARR. MURRAY AND BARR STRESSED THAT CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUE WAS CLEAR AND VITAL IN 1974 AND EXPRESSED DOUBTS THAT STRIKE NOW WOULD GET NECESSARY SUPPORT OR DO PROVINCE ANY GOOD. NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE IS EMPHASIZING LATEST UNEMPLOYMENT FIGURES AND "DISASTROUS" EFFECT STRIKE WOULD HAVE ON INVESTORS, ACTUAL AND POTENTIAL.

4. WHILE ALL LOYALISTS (PROTESTANTS) WOULD LIKE MORE DONE TO
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CURB PROVISIONAL IRA, NOT ALL LOYALISTS ARE STRONGLY OPPOSED TO DIRECT RULE. PAISLEY AND BAIRD HAVE REFUSED TO GIVE DETAILS OF THEIR PLANS OR TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT A GENERAL STOPPAGE WAS BEING CONSIDERED. PROTEST COULD TAKE OTHER FORMS SUCH AS RATE (TAX) AND RENT STRIKES, REFUSAL TO PAY VALUE ADDED TAX, PARADES AND TEMPORARY DISRUPTIONS SUCH AS STREET BARRICADES. LATTER TACTIC DIFFICULT FOR POLITICIANS TO CONTROL AND RISKS ESCALATION TO INTIMIDATION, VEHICLE HI-JACKINGS AND OTHER VIOLENCE. THEY COULD STILL BACK OFF FROM A STRIKE. PAISLEY DOES NOT WANT VIOLENCE. BAIRD, IN A QUIET WAY, IS MORE IRRECONCILABLE THAN PAISLEY AND ENJOYS MORE TRUST BY THE PARAMILITARIES AND URBAN WORKERS. HOWEVER, BAIRD HAS NO RPT NO TASTE FOR A CONFRONTATION WITH SECURITY FORCES, ESPECIALLY WITH ROYAL ULSTER CONSTABULARY. UNIONIST ACTION COUNCIL IS SHAKY COALITION AND REPORTING OFFICER IS AS YET UNCONVINCED OF ITS ABILITY TO MOUNT A SUCCESSFUL PROVINCE-WIDE STOPPAGE. FEW AGREE HOWEVER AND THERE EXTENSIVE HOARDING OF CANNED GOODS, BTTLLED GAS AND GASOLINE.SPICER

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